

ACID RED 27 BIODECOLOURISATION AND BIOGENIC ELECTRICITY
GENERATION IN STACKED MICROBIAL FUEL CELL BY
Citrobacter freundii A1 AND *Enterococcus casseliflavus* C1

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ABSTRACT

Microbial fuel cell (MFC) is an electrochemical system which utilises microorganisms to generate electricity via its catalytic activities. Recently, the capability of MFC in generating electricity has been assimilated with wastewater treatment as an alternative approach for a sustainable and eco-friendly technology. Although the MFC has the potential to be synchronised with both the wastewater treatment and electricity generation application, the amount of electricity generated from this technology is still insufficient. This study employed *Citrobacter freundii* A1 and *Enterococcus casseliflavus* C1 bacterial consortia that have been previously isolated and identified in the assessment of azo dye biodecolourisation and biogenic electricity generation in dual-chamber salt bridge MFC. Initially, the feasibility of sequential facultative anaerobic-aerobic treatment for complete dye degradation was evaluated using Acid Red 27 (AR-27) dyes where 98% decolourisation was achieved using 0.5 g/L glucose and 1.0 g/L nutrient broth as co-substrates under static condition for the non-MFC study. Ultra Violet-Visible spectroscopy and Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) spectroscopic analyses confirmed that the azo linkage was cleaved after the decolourisation occurred. The cyclic voltammetry analyses also showed that the decolourisation of AR-27 by *C. freundii* A1 and *E. casseliflavus* C1 was an electrochemically irreversible reaction while the detection of oxidation reaction during aerobic treatment proved that the process of mineralisation took place. The degradation of AR-27 was also confirmed by the decrease in catechol concentration detected through High-Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC) analysis. Simultaneous electricity generation and wastewater treatment were conducted by connecting two individual MFC in parallel with optimised 5000 Ω external resistance and 3.0 M sodium chloride salt bridge concentration. The maximum voltage recorded by the open circuit voltage and close circuit voltage was 595 mV and 84 ± 15 mV, respectively. While the power and current density generated by the optimised MFC system was 10.15 ± 2 mA/m² and 0.86 ± 0.3 mW/m². The use of higher concentration of sodium chloride salt bridge and parallel configuration in MFC was able to improve the MFC performance by generating higher current and output power. Scanning Electron Microscope image and bacterial cell number analysis revealed the surface morphology and biofilm development during the MFC operation with the adhesion of microorganisms on the electrode surface. Besides, FTIR analysis on the MFC electrode after operation also showed the presence of biofilm with the detection of extracellular polymeric substances (EPSs) functional groups on the electrode surface. In conclusion, *C. freundii* A1 and *E. casseliflavus* C1 consortium has the potential to be used in simultaneous azo dye wastewater treatment and biogenic electricity generation using the MFC technologies.

ABSTRAK

Sel bahan api mikrob (MFC) merupakan satu sistem elektrokimia yang menggunakan mikroorganisma untuk menjana tenaga elektrik melalui aktiviti pemangkinnya. Baru-baru ini, keupayaan MFC dalam menjana tenaga elektrik telah diasimilasikan dengan rawatan air sisa sebagai kaedah alternatif untuk teknologi yang mampan dan mesra alam. Walaupun MFC ini mempunyai potensi untuk diselaraskan dengan kedua-dua aplikasi rawatan air sisa dan penjanaan tenaga elektrik, jumlah tenaga elektrik yang dihasilkan oleh teknologi ini masih lagi tidak memadai. Kajian ini menggunakan konsortia bakteria *Citrobacter freundii* A1 dan *Enterococcus casseliflavus* C1 yang sebelum ini telah dipencilkan dan dikenal pasti keboleh upayannya dalam penyahwarnaan bio dan penjanaan tenaga elektrik biogenik di dalam MFC dwi ruang yang menggunakan jambatan garam. Pada mulanya, kebolehlaksanaan rawatan fakultatif anaerobik-aerobik secara berurutan telah diuji untuk degradasi sempurna pewarna Asid Merah 27 (AR-27) yang mana 98% penyahwarnaan telah dicapai dengan menggunakan 0.5 g/L glukosa dan 1.0 g/L kaldu nutrien sebagai substrat bersama dalam keadaan statik untuk kajian yang tidak menggunakan MFC. Analisis spektroskopi Ultra Lembayung-Nampak dan Fourier Infra-Merah (FTIR) telah mengesahkan bahawa ikatan azo telah diputuskan semasa proses penyahwarnaan berlaku. Analisis kitaran voltammetrik menunjukkan bahawa penyahwarnaan AR-27 oleh *C. freundii* A1 dan *E. casseliflavus* C1 merupakan tindak balas elektrokimia yang tidak berbalik sementara pengesanan tindak balas pengoksidaan semasa rawatan aerobik membuktikan proses mineralisasi telah berlaku. Degradasi pewarna AR-27 juga dipastikan melalui penurunan kepekatan katekol yang dikesan melalui analisis Kromatografi Cecair Prestasi Tinggi (HPLC). Penjanaan tenaga elektrik dan rawatan air sisa telah dilakukan secara serentak dengan menghubungkan dua MFC secara selari dengan menggunakan jumlah rintangan luaran 5000 Ω dan kepekatan jambatan garam sodium klorida sebanyak 3.0 M yang telah dioptimumkan. Jumlah maksimum voltan yang telah direkodkan dalam litar terbuka dan litar tertutup adalah masing-masing sebanyak 595 mV dan 84 ± 15 mV. Manakala, jumlah ketumpatan kuasa dan arus yang dihasilkan oleh MFC yang telah dioptimumkan adalah 10.15 ± 2 mA/m² dan 0.86 ± 0.3 mW/m². Penggunaan sodium klorida dengan kepekatan tinggi dan sambungan selari dalam MFC telah membolehkan peningkatan prestasi MFC dalam menjana jumlah arus dan kuasa yang tinggi. Imej mikroskopi elektron pengimbasan dan analisa jumlah sel bakteria telah menunjukkan morfologi permukaan elektrod dan pembentukan biofilem semasa operasi MFC melalui pelekatan bakteria pada permukaan elektrod. Di samping itu, analisis FTIR ke atas elektrod selepas operasi MFC turut menunjukkan kehadiran biofilem dengan pengenalan kumpulan berfungsi bagi bahan polimer ekstrasel (EPSs) pada permukaan elektrod. Kesimpulannya, konsortia *C. freundii* A1 dan *E. casseliflavus* C1 mempunyai potensi untuk diaplikasikan bagi rawatan air sisa pewarna azo dan penghasilan tenaga elektrik biogenik secara serentak dengan menggunakan teknologi MFC.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE
	DECLARATION	ii
	DEDICATION	iii
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
	ABSTRACT	v
	ABSTRAK	vi
	TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
	LIST OF TABLES	xiii
	LIST OF FIGURES	xv
	LIST OF ABBREVIATION / SYMBOLS	xx
	LIST OF APPENDICES	xxiii
1	INTRODUCTION	1
	1.1 Background of Study	1
	1.2 Problem Statement	3
	1.3 Objectives	6
	1.4 Scope of the Study	7
	1.5 Significance of the Study	8
2	LITERATURE REVIEW	9
	2.1 Textile Wastewater	9
	2.2 Azo dye- A Major Component in Textile	12

	Wastewater	
2.3	Conventional Textile Wastewater Treatment	13
2.4	Acid Red 27 (AR 27) dyes	16
2.5	Azo Dyes Degradations by Bacteria	16
2.6	Azo Dye Decolourisation Mechanism by Bacteria	22
2.7	<i>Citrobacter freundii</i> A1 and <i>Enterococcus casseliflavus</i> C1 Bacterial Consortium	27
2.8	Microbial Fuel Cell (MFC) – An Overview	28
2.9	Bacteria Electron Transfer mechanisms in MFC	31
2.10	Factors Affecting MFC Performances	33
	2.10.1 External Resistance in MFC	34
	2.10.2 Salt Bridge in MFC	37
	2.10.3 Stacked MFC	40
	2.10.3 Connections Configuration in Stacked MFC	41
2.11	MFC and Wastewater Treatment	43
2.12	Bioelectricity Generation by <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 Bacterial Consortium in Stacked MFC	45
2.12	Biofilm Development on MFC Anode	47
3	MATERIAL AND METHOD	50
3.1	Experiment Design	50
3.2	Materials	51
	3.2.1 Microorganisms	51
	3.2.2 Chemicals	52
3.3	Methods	52
	3.3.1 Preparation of Growth Medium	52
	3.3.1.1 Preparation of Nutrient Agar	52
	3.3.2 Preparation of P5 Medium	53
	3.3.3 Preparation of P5 Media and Modified P5 Medium Stock Solution	53
	3.3.3.1 Glucose (20% w/v)	53

3.3.3.2 Nutrient Broth (20% w/v)	54
3.3.3.3 Trace Elements	54
3.3.3.4 Preparation of Acid Red 27 (AR-27)	54
Stock Dye Solution	
3.3.4 Preparation of Bacteria Culture	54
3.3.5 Co-substrates Concentration Optimisation for	55
Decolourisation Efficiency	
3.3.5.1 Optimisation of Glucose and Nutrient	55
Broth Concentration	
3.3.6 Determination of AR-27 Decolourisation	56
Efficiency by <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 Bacterial Consortium	
3.3.6.1 AR-27 Decolourisation Percentage	57
3.3.7 Determination of Bacteria Dry Cell Weigh	57
Standard Curve	
3.2.7.1 Dry Cell Weight	57
3.2.7.2 Indirect Determination of Bacteria	58
Concentration	
3.3.8 Determination of Dissolved Oxygen (DO)	58
and Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD)	
3.3.9 Determination of AR-27 Degradation	59
3.3.10 Determination of Reducing Sugar by DNS	60
Analysis	
3.3.11 Determination of Total Polyphenolic	61
Content (TPP)	
3.3.12 Determination of Redox Reaction by	61
Chronoamperometry and Cyclic	
Voltametric Analysis	
3.3.13 High Performances Liquid Chromatography	62
Analysis	
3.3.14 Microbial Fuel Cell Setup and Operation	64
3.3.14.1 Preparation of Bacterial Culture for	65
MFC Operation	

	3.3.14.2 Preparation of Modified P5 Medium for MFC Operation	66
	3.3.14.3 Preparation of Phosphate Buffer Solution (PBS) for MFC Operation	66
	3.3.14.4 Preparation of MFC Salt Bridge	67
	3.3.15 MFC Data Collection and Analysis	67
	3.3.16 MFC Polarisation Curves and Electrochemical Analysis	69
	3.3.17 Optimisation of MFC Operation System	70
	3.3.17.1 Effects of External Resistances .in MFC System	70
	3.3.17.2 Effects of Salt Bridge Concentration in MFC System	70
	3.3.17.3 Effects of Connections Configuration in MFC System	71
	3.3.18 Anode Characterisation of Optimised MFC system	72
	3.3.18.1 Pre-treatment of MFC Bioanode	73
	3.3.18.2 Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) Imaging and Energy Dispersive X-ray (EDX) Analysis	73
	3.3.18.3 Fourier Transformed Infrared (FTIR) Spectroscopy	73
	3.3.18.4 Determination of Bacterial Cell Number Using Drop Plate Technique	74
	3.4 Data Analysis	76
4	Biodecolourisation and Degradation of Acid Red 27 By <i>Citrobacter freundii</i> A1 and <i>Enterococcus casseliflavus</i> C1 Bacterial Consortium	77
	4.1 Introduction	77

4.2	Results and Discussion	78
4.2.1	Optimisation of Co-Substrates Concentration for AR-27 Decolourisation by <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1	78
4.2.2	Generation of Electrons During Azo Dye Decolourisation Utilising <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 Bacterial Consortium in Different Concentrations of Nutrient Broth (NB) and Glucose	84
4.2.3	Azo Dye Decolourisation by <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 Bacterial Consortium	89
4.2.4	Electrochemical Analysis for AR-27 Decolourisation by <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E.</i> <i>casseliflavus</i> C1 Bacterial Consortium.	94
4.2.5	Determination of Catechols Degradation by <i>C.</i> <i>freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 Bacterial Consortium	98
4.3	Summary	102
5	MFC Optimisation For Biogenic Electricity Generation By <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 Bacterial Consortium	103
5.1	Introduction	103
5.2	Results and Discussion	104
5.2.1	Microbial Fuel Cell Optimisation for Biogenic Electricity Production	104
5.2.2	Effect of External Loads in Microbial Fuel Cell	105
5.2.3	Effect of Sodium Chloride (NaCl) Concentration in Salt Bridge MFC	109
5.2.4	Effect of Connections Configuration in Microbial Fuel Cell	113

5.3	Summary	117
6	Assessment Of Biogenic Electricity Generation and AR-27 Decolourisation By <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 In Stacked MFC	119
6.1	Introduction	119
6.2	Results and discussion	120
6.2.1	Assessment of biogenic electricity generation and AR-27 Decolourisation by <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 in stacked MFC	120
6.2.2	Assessment of Biogenic Electricity Generation by Stacked MFC	120
6.2.3	MFC Biofilm Morphology and Development	127
6.3	Summary	132
7	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	134
7.1	Conclusions	134
7.2	Recommendations	135
	REFERENCES	137
	Appendices A –E	153 - 161

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE NO	TITLE	PAGE
2.1	Sources of pollutants at each level of textile processing that generates wastewater (Verma <i>et al.</i> , 2012)	11
2.2	Advantages and disadvantages of biological treatment method for treating the finishing textile wastewater (Pang and Abdullah, 2013)	17
2.3	Summary review of microbial consortium used in decolourisation of synthetic dyes	20 - 21
2.4	Summary review of azo dye degradation metabolites generated during treatment	26
2.5	MFC configuration and schematic diagram for MFC operation	30
2.6	Summary review of external resistances studies in MFC	36
2.7	Summary review of salt bridge MFC studies	39
2.8	Summary review of stacked MFC studies	42
2.9	Summary review for MFC studies using synthetic wastewater (Pandey <i>et al.</i> , 2016)	44
2.10	Summary review for MFC studies using real wastewater (Pandey <i>et al.</i> , 2016)	45
2.11	Summary review of biofilm formation on MFC anode electrode surface	48
4.1	Effect of glucose and nutrient broth concentrations for AR-27 decolourisation, bacteria growth, and COD removal by <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1	83
4.2	Maximum electron production by nutrient broth and glucose during azo dye decolourisation	86

4.3	Comparison of synthetic azo dye decolourisation using bacterial consortium in previous studies	88
5.1	Summarised results of the effect of external loads on MFC system	108
5.2	Summarised result on the effect of NaCl concentrations in MFC system.	111
5.3	Summarised results on the effect of MFC connection configuration in MFC system	115
6.1	Elements percentage comparison between analysis for control graphite felt and graphite felt after MFC operation	130

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE NO	TITLE	PAGE
2.1	Wastewater characteristic in textile manufacturing processes (Verma <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Pang and Abdullah, 2013)	10
2.2	Environmental Quality (Industrial Effluents) Regulations 2009 (PU(A) 434) for acceptable conditions for discharge of industrial effluent for mixed effluent of standards a and b. water intake point for consumption or water catchment areas	14
2.3	Environmental Quality (Industrial Effluents) Regulations 2009 (PU(A) 434) for acceptable conditions for discharge of industrial effluent containing Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD) for specific trade or industry sector. * Standard A - The point of discharge into the river is upstream from a water intake point for consumption or water catchment area, Standard B - the point of discharge into the river is downstream from a water intake point for consumption or water catchment areas	15
2.4	Chemical structure of Acid Red 27 (Radetic <i>et al.</i> 2003)	16
2.5	Dye colour removal mechanisms under (a) aerobic, (b) anaerobic and (c) facultative anaerobic condition (Mohan <i>et al.</i> , 2013)	23
2.6	(a) General overview of the fate of azo dyes and aromatic amines during anaerobic–aerobic treatment (Zhee van deer <i>et al.</i> , 2005). (b) Proposed mechanism for reduction of azo dyes by whole bacterial cells (Pearce <i>et al.</i> , 2003)	25
2.7	Comparison between bacteria strains combination in NAR-I and NAR-II bacterial consortium for azo dye decolourisation	27

	and degradation.	
2.8	Schematic diagram of electron transfer mechanisms in MFC of bacteria (Rahimnejad <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Logan <i>et al.</i> , 2006)	31
2.9	Illustration of the Direct Electron Transfer (DET) via (a) membrane bound cytochromes, (b) electronically conducting nanowires and (c) simplified schematic of Mediator Electron Transfer (MET) via mediator (Schröder <i>et al.</i> , 2007)	32
2.10	Stacked MFC set up by (a) connecting multiple unit of individual MFC with external wires (Kim and Logan, 2011) or (b) layered several MFC units into a single large MFC unit (Aelterman <i>et al.</i> , 2006)	40
2.11	Comparison between NAR-II bacterial consortium and <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 bacterial consortium for azo dye decolourisation and electricity generation in MFC	46
2.12	Processes governing biofilm formation (Breyers and Ratner, 2004; Simões <i>et al.</i> , 2010)	47
3.1	Flow chart of the research methodology.	51
3.2	Summarized procedure for the determination of azo dye degradation using HPLC analysis	63
3.3	Microbial Fuel Cell (MFC) design and operation	65
3.4	MFC operation in (a) open circuit voltage and (b) close circuit voltage	68
3.5	Stack MFC setup and operation in the (a) series and (b) parallel connections	72
3.6	Biofilm cell number determination using drop plate technique	75
4.1	Effects of co-substrates concentration on decolourisation efficiency performances (a), bacteria dry cell weight (b) , and COD removal throughout AR-27 treatment under sequential facultative anaerobic-aerobic condition.. *FA-facultative anaerobic, A – aerobic.	82

4.2	The AR-27 solutions after 72 h of aerobic agitation. (a) –ve Control, (b) +ve Control, (c) AR-27 solution supplemented with 0.5 g/L glucose, (d) AR-27 solution supplemented with 1 g/L Nutrient Broth, (e) AR-27 solution supplemented with 1 g/L Nutrient Broth + 0.5 g/L glucose, (f) AR-27 solution supplemented with 2 g/L Nutrient Broth + 1 g/L glucose, (g) AR-27 solution supplemented with 3 g/L Nutrient Broth + 1.5 g/L glucose, (h) AR-27 solution supplemented with 4 g/L Nutrient Broth + 2 g/L glucose and (i) AR-27 solution supplemented with 5 g/L yeast extract + 2.5 g/L glucose	84
4.3	Electrons production comparison between nutrient Broth (NB) and Glucose during azo dye decolourisation by <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 bacterial consortium*NB – nutrient broth, FA-facultative anaerobic, A – aerobic	86
4.4	Azo dye decolourisation of <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 bacterial consortium. (a) Decolourisation percentages and dry cell weight. (b) COD removal and dissolved oxygen. *FA-facultative anaerobic, A – aerobic	89
4.5	Reducing sugar and total polyphenol analysis for AR-27 decolourisation. *FA-facultative anaerobic, A – aerobic	91
4.6	Spectrum analysis for AR-27 decolourisation	93
4.7	FTIR spectra of azo bond reduction (a) before and (b) after decolourisation	94
4.8	Cyclic voltamograms analysis for AR-27 treatment by <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 bacteria consortium under facultative anaerobic condition	95
4.9	Cyclic voltamograms analysis for AR-27 treatment by <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 bacteria consortium under aerobic condition	96
4.10	Cyclic voltammogram analysis for AR-27 treatment in sequential facultative anaerobic-aerobic with differences scan rates at (a) 2 hours, (b) 24 hours, (c) 48 hours and (d) 72 hours	97

4.11	HPLC analysis for AR-27 treatment based on catechol degradation (a) Standard catechol (100 mg/L), (b) 2 hours of facultative anaerobic treatment, (c) 24 hours aerobic treatment, (d) 48 hours aerobic treatment and (e) 72 hours aerobic treatment. Catechol was detected with the approximate retention time of 4.02 minutes	99
4.12	Proposed AR-27 and Catechol* degradation pathway by <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 bacterial consortium (Chan <i>et al</i> , 2012c)	101
5.1	Comparison between MFC operation in (a) open circuit voltage (OCV) and (b) close circuit voltage (CCV) and (c) MFC polarisation curve	106
5.2	Comparison between NaCl concentrations and voltage output of (a) open circuit voltage (OCV) and (b) close circuit voltage (CCV)	110
5.3	Comparison between NaCl concentrations and MFC (a) current density and (b) power density	112
5.4	Comparison between the types of MFC connections and voltage output in (a) open circuit voltage (OCV) and (b) close circuit voltage (CCV)	114
5.5	Comparison between type of MFC connections for (a) current density and (b) power density	116
6.1	Biogenic electricity generation via stack MFC in (a) OCV, (b) CCV, and (c) polarisation curve for stack MFC	121
6.2	AR-27 treatments by <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 in stacked salt bridge MFC. *(FA-Facultative anaerobic, A-aerobic)	123
6.3	Cyclic voltamograms analysis on AR-27 treatment by <i>C. freundii</i> A1 and <i>E. casseliflavus</i> C1 consortia in stacked MFC	124
6.4	SEM imaging for (a) control graphite felt before MFC operation. Biofilm development on the MFC electrode within (b) 2 hours, (c) 24 hours, (d) 48 hours, and matured biofilm structure after (e) 72 hours. (5k magnification)	128

6.5	Comparison study on the total number of bacterial cell in the AR-27 solution and biofilm during the MFC operation	129
6.6	Energy Dispersive X-ray (EDX) analysis for (a) control graphite felt and (b) graphite felt after the MFC operation	130
6.7	Infrared spectra for (a) control graphite felt and (b) MFC graphite felt after the operation	131

LIST OF ABBREVIATION / SYMBOLS

%	-	Percent
μA	-	Microampere
μL	-	Microlitre
μm	-	Micrometre
μV	-	Microvolt
A	-	Surface area
Abs	-	Absorbances
Abs _{600nm}		Absorbance at the wavelength of 600 nm
A_f	-	Final absorbance
Ag ₂ SO ₄	-	Silver sulphate
A_i	-	Initial absorbance
AR-27	-	Acid Red 27
BOD	-	Biological oxygen demand
C/N	-	Carbon per nitrogen
CCV		Close circuit voltage
CFU/mL	-	Colony forming unit per milli litre
Cm	-	Centimeter
COD	-	Chemical oxygen demand
CuSO ₄	-	Copper sulphate
CV	-	Cyclic voltammetry
DET	-	Direct electron transfer
DNS	-	Dinitrosalicylic
e ⁻	-	Electrons
EDX	-	Energy dispersive X-ray
EPSs	-	Exopolysaccharides
FADH	-	Flavin adenine dinucleotide
FeCl ₂	-	Ferrous dichloride

FTIR	-	Fourier Transform Infrared spectroscopy
G	-	Gram
g/L	-	Gram per liters
g-unit	-	G – Force
h	-	Hours
H ⁺	-	Hydrogen ion
H ₂ SO ₄	-	Sulphuric acid
HgSO ₄	-	Mercury sulphate
HPLC	-	High performances liquid chromatography
I	-	Current
J	-	Current density
K ₂ Cr ₂ O ₇	-	Potassium dichromate
K ₂ HPO ₄	-	Dipotassium hydrogen phosphate
KCl	-	Potassium chloride
KH ₂ PO ₄	-	Potassium dihydrogen phosphate
kPa	-	Kilopascal
kW·h·m ⁻³	-	Kilowatt hour per metre cube
L	-	Litre
LC-MS	-	Liquid chromatography – mass spectrometry
M	-	Molar
mA	-	Milliampere
MFC	-	Microbial fuel cell
mg/mL	-	milligram per millilitre
mL	-	Milliliters
mL/min	-	Millilitre per minute
mM	-	Millimolar
mm	-	Millimetre
MnCl ₂ .2H ₂ O	-	Manganese (II) chloride dehydrate
MP5 medium	-	Modified P5 medium
mS/cm	-	Milli siemens per centimetre
mV	-	Millivolt
mV/s	-	Millivolt per second
mW/m ²	-	Milliwatts per metre square

MΩ	-	Mega ohm
Na ₂ CO ₃	-	Sodium carbonate
NaCl	-	Sodium chloride
NADH	-	Nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide
NADPH	-	Nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate
NaMoO ₄ .2H ₂ O	-	Molybdic acid sodium salt dehydrate
nm	-	Nanometre
Ø	-	Diameter
°C	-	Degree Celsius
OCV	-	Open circuit voltage
OD	-	Optical density
OM	-	Outer membrane
P	-	Power density
PEM	-	Proton exchange membrane
R _{ext}	-	External resistance
RPM	-	Revolution per minutes
SS	-	Suspended solid
TOC	-	Total organic carbon
TPP	-	Total polyphenol
UV-Vis	-	Ultra violet visible
V	-	Volt
v/v	-	Volume to volume
w/v	-	Weight to volume
λ	-	Wavelength
λ _{max}	-	Maximum wavelength
Ω	-	Ohm

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX	TITLE	PAGE
A	Calculation of carbon mass and nitrogen mass in co-substrate for C/N ratio	153
B	Standard curve for analysis	155
	1. Standard curve determination for AR-27 concentration against absorbances 521 nm.	155
	2. Standard curve determination for bacteria dry cell weight against absorbances 600 nm.	155
	3. Standard curve for determination of glucose concentration	156
	4. Standard curve for determination of total polyphenol concentration	156
C	Standard curve for the determination of catechol degradation	157
	1. HPLC analysis for determination of catechol standard	157
	2. Standard Standard curve for catechol concentration	158
D	Microbial Fuel Cell	159
	1. Microbial Fuel Cell (MFC) design and construction	159
	2. MFC set up and operation	160
E	Publication and Presentation	161

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Study

The production of sustainable energy and wastewater treatment has introduced an area of interest among the global community due to the facts that the world is facing severe environmental problems and global energy crisis. In term of energy crisis, issues related to fossil fuel depletion and non-renewable energy resource shortages have been debated as it is crucial for the industrialisation and urbanisation activities (Karthikeyan and Kanchana, 2014). Intensive effort has been proposed and developed in order to obtain a more sustainable treatment in handling the pollution issues which corresponds to the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. This modernisations activities results in severe global issues such as the discharge of large amounts of waste into the environment either through the water body, ground or air which in turn creates more pollution (Karthikeyan and Kanchana, 2014). This situation leads to environmental concerned as their biorecalcitrance might carry potential toxicity effects on plants, animals and humans being (Martin *et al.*, 2002).

Currently, water pollution which is due to the discharged of wastewater into water bodies is one of the major concerns among the global community. It was reported that many industrial activities have been discharging their manufacturing waste into the water body without properly treating their waste before releasing it into the environment. One of the components that cause water pollution is coloured effluents consisting of dyes which are released by the textile dyestuff and dyeing industries (Idris *et al.*, 2007). Such pollution is particularly associated with the

reactive dyes, which accounts for a significant proportion of the total dye market (Karthikeyan and Kanchana, 2014). Moreover, in recent reactive dyeing processes, it is estimated that up to 50% of the dye used was lost to the wastewater (Mu *et al.*, 2009; Saranraj, 2013; Saranraj and Sivasakthivelan, 2014) due to the relatively low dye fiber fixation.

Azo dye is an aromatic compound containing one or more azo bond ($-N=N-$) and it is widely used as major components by the industry (Chen *et al.*, 2003). However, these dyes are highly stable and resistant to microbial degradation which makes it not easily degradable under natural condition or by conventional wastewater treatment process (Stolz, 2001). Current treatment such as Physio-chemical method has been applied to remove dye from textile wastewater, but its application are expensive and ineffective (Pandey *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, this method will cause secondary pollution problems and producing concentrated sludge as by-products in which difficult to be disposed (Pearce *et al.*, 2003).

Thus, a more convenient and environmentally friendly wastewater treatment had been introduced using biological approach which involves microorganisms (Zhang *et al.*, 2004; Saratale *et al.*, 2011; Abdul-Wahab *et al.*, 2013). It was found that a variety of bacterial species that are not only capable of decolourising, but also able to completely mineralise many reactive dyes under certain conditions (Kumar *et al.*, 2012). Bacterial degradation of dyes is often initiated under static/anaerobic conditions by an enzymatic transformation reaction for dye decolourisation which results in the formation of aromatic amines (Kumar *et al.*, 2012). Then, this aromatic amine are further oxidised and mineralised to form a simpler non-toxic by-product under aerobic conditions (Chan *et al.* 2012c; Kumar *et al.*, 2012).

Recently, fuel cells technology has received attention as an alternative approach for renewable energy generation due to the high energy density, up scaling applicability and simple modular use (Evan *et al.*, 2012). This technology will enables the conversion of electrochemical energy for electricity generation and storage (Evan *et al.*, 2012). The electricity produced in fuel cell is obtained through the reaction between the fuel (anode) and oxidant (cathode) in the presence of an

electrolyte (Evan *et al.*, 2012). Compared to batteries, fuel cell requires the reactant (anode) to be replenished due to the electrochemical reaction consumption. One of the example of fuel cell that is currently been study for electricity generation is Microbial Fuel Cell (MFC). MFC uses the principle of converting organic matter into electrical energy through the microorganism's catalytic activities (Chaudhuri and Lovley, 2003). In MFC, the electrochemically active microorganisms in anode oxidise the organic co-substrates that eventually generate electron (Logan *et al.*, 2006; Lai *et al.*, 2017). This electron is then transferred to the MFC cathode through an external circuit with the assistance of the microorganisms to generate current. Ion exchange membrane is fixed in the MFC to allow proton migration while separating the anode and cathode chamber (Logan *et al.*, 2006; Solanki *et al.*, 2013; Lai *et al.*, 2017). Hence, it is plausible for azo dyes to be introduced into the MFC as an anolyte (anode analyte) for the simultaneous azo dye treatment and electricity generation based on the electron generated by the metabolic activity of azo degrading bacteria (Sun *et al.*, 2011). The application of this technology has also the potential to provide an alternative clean and renewable form of energy in the near future.

1.2 Problem Statement

The textile industry is one of the fastest growing industries and contributes significantly to the economic growth in Malaysia. According to previous report, Malaysia is the ninth largest producer and exporter of textile fiber in the Asian region in 2008 which rise to seventh in 2011 (Pang and Abdullah 2013; Esho, 2015). Although the textile industry contributes positively toward the Malaysian economic growth, it was found that the industry pose a significant threat to the environmental quality, especially in terms of liquid effluent pollution and high energy consumption operational system. Moreover, this untreated textile wastewater may cause harm to the environment due to its xenobiotic and carcinogenic properties (Kumar *et al.*, 2012). In response to the increasing cost of energy, the Malaysian government has focused on strengthening its conservation policies. The government is also continually reviewing its energy policy to ensure sustainability of the energy resources (Mohamed and Lee, 2006) as it was estimated that the primary energy

consumption would triple by 2030 (Gan and Li, 2008). Furthermore, the global warming issues and exhaustion of fossil fuels together with unstable petroleum prices in the global market have encouraged the Malaysian government to start focusing on renewable energy as a promising sources in the global energy mix in line with the National Energy Policy (1979). As an alternative (with the agreement of the National Renewable Energy Policy and Action Plan (2009) that encourages the innovation and the invention of Malaysian renewable energy sources), a novel process, i.e., MFC technology was chosen to be adapted for electrical energy production in wastewater treatment. As an energy source, wastewaters show a plausible outcome to be utilised as the MFC anolyte due to diverse types of organic substrate (Rahimnejad, 2015).

Although currently the idea of MFC being a power generator is not sufficient for large or industrial scale due to its low power output, especially by using single unit MFC (Logan, 2008; Gurung and Oh, 2012), the production of energy from the wastewater treatment in MFC should be given applause. This pilot study focused on the increase in electricity generation and enhance in wastewater quality analysis by using synthetic textile wastewater model. Several studies have recommended optimisation which includes the electrogenic azo degrading bacteria and the MFC system itself. The optimisation is crucial, especially for the application of MFC in textile wastewater treatment due to the fact that the system has to treat the wastewater efficiently while simultaneously produce electrical energy. For example, the concentration of co-substrates use by azo degrading bacteria must be sufficient to treat the textile wastewater and an ideal operating system must be developed to enhance the MFC performance. However, materials cost for MFC, the proton accumulation within the biofilm and over potential at the MFC are just a few problems that need solutions. Besides, the maximum power production is limited by internal resistances, ohmic losses in the solution, electrochemical losses at the electrodes, and bacterial metabolic losses (Ter Heijne *et al.*, 2011).

Earlier, Chan *et al.*, (2011) has isolated, identified and developed azo degrading bacterial consortia called NAR-I which composed of *Enterococcus casseliflavus* C1 and *Enterobacter cloacae* L17. This NAR-I bacteria consortium has the ability to achieve 95% decolourisation using Acid Orange 7 (AO7) dyes within

60 minutes incubation. Later, a novel azo degrading bacteria consortia was formed with the name NAR-II consisting of *Citrobacter freundii* A1, *Enterococcus casseliflavus* C1 and *Enterobacter cloacae* L17 which possessed the ability to achieve nearly 100% decolourisation within 30 minute incubation using Acid Red 27 (AR-27) dyes. These two distinctive azo dye decolourisation studies were performed under facultative anaerobic condition with the addition of co-substrates (glucose and nutrient broth) and synthetic dyes.

To date, the NAR-II bacteria consortium performance has been assessed for electricity generation by using a dual chamber (H-type) MFC for azo dye decolourisation using glucose (5.0 g/L) and nutrient broth (10.0 g/L) as co-substrates (Kardi *et al.*, 2016). The results showed the potential of simultaneous electricity generation in MFC and azo dye removal by achieving maximum voltage of 0.950 V for open circuit voltages (OCV), maximum power density 951 mW/m² (300 Ω) and 93% decolourisation using 0.3 g/L AR-27 within 24 hours at fixed the temperature of 30°C (Kardi *et al.*, 2016).

However, the performance of decolourisation of azo dye and bioelectricity generation via stacked microbial fuel cell (MFC) by using a bacteria combination of *C. freundii* A1 and *E. casseliflavus* C1 consortia has yet been studied. *Citrobacter* sp. strain A1 was isolated from a sewage oxidation pond, which is characterised as a Gram-negative enteric coccobacillus, facultative aerobe and mesophilic dye-degrading bacterium (Chan *et al.*, 2012a). This organism degrades azo dyes efficiently *via* azo reduction and desulfonation, followed by the successive biotransformation of dye intermediates under aerobic environment (Chan *et al.*, 2012a). In contrast, *Enterococcus* sp. strain C1 is a Gram-positive facultative anaerobe which was co-isolated with *Citrobacter* sp. strain A1 from a sewage oxidation pond (Chan *et al.*, 2012b) and could degrade azo dyes very efficiently *via* azo reduction and desulfonation in a microaerophilic environment (Chan *et al.*, 2012b).

Hence, this study focused on the azo dye treatment using an novel azo degrading bacterial consortium consisting *C. freundii* A1 and *E.*

casseliflavus C1 while simultaneously performing a series of optimisation for the salt bridge MFC system in order to increase the bioelectricity generations in the form of stacked microbial fuel cell (MFC). In this study, MFC that use salt bridge for the proton exchange was initially optimised before being tested for stacked MFC. The setup of a stacked MFC involves the connection of multiple units of individuals MFC through serial or parallel connection configuration. Therefore, it is crucial to fully grasp the basic operation for the application of stacked microbial fuel cell for electricity generation.

1.3 Objective of Research

Based on current understanding and recent study on azo dye decolourisation and MFC application, this study was performed to assess the potential of azo dye degrading bacteria in an optimised stacked MFC. This includes the determination of azo dye removal by the bacteria consortium and biogenic electricity performance in the MFC. Hence, these objectives were established in the research to achieve the research aim:

- a). To investigate the performance of azo dye decolourisation by using *Citrobacter freundii* A1 and *Enterococcus casseliflavus* C1 bacterial consortium with Acid Red 27 (AR-27) as the dye model.
- b). To design, construct and optimise the operating condition of MFC for bioelectricity generation and wastewater treatment.
- c). To characterize the biofilm formation on MFC anode electrode during the MFC operation based on AR-27 decolourisation.

1.4 Scope of Research

The main scope of this research was to assess the performance of *C. freundii* A1 and *E. casseliflavus* C1 bacteria consortium in stacked salt bridge MFC. Hence, these scopes were established to accomplish the azo dye decolourisation and biogenic electricity study.

This study investigated the performance of *C. freundii* A1 and *E. casseliflavus* C1 bacteria consortium in azo dye decolourisation and degradation by using modified P5 (MP5) medium with AR-27 as the dye model under sequential facultative anaerobic-aerobic conditions. Here, the effect of co-substrates concentration (glucose and nutrient broth) in modified P5 medium was optimised by lowering the concentration of the substrates based on previous studies (Chan *et al.*, 2011; Chan *et al.*, 2012c; Kardi *et al.*, 2016).

For the MFC study, the constructions of dual chamber salt bridge MFC for biogenic electricity generation was initially conducted in which several parameters were evaluated such as external loads, salt bridge concentration and connection configuration (series/parallel).

Next, the study continues on the performance of optimised stacked salt bridge MFC for azo dye decolourisation in terms of wastewater treatment and biogenic electricity generation under sequential facultative anaerobic - aerobic conditions. Hence, the study demonstrated the first generation of stacked salt bridge MFC operated under sequential facultative anaerobic-aerobic conditions.

Lastly, the morphological study of biofilm formation on the anode surface area throughout the MFC operation was performed in order to monitor the biofilm development during the MFC operation.

1.5 Significance of Research

Based on earlier studies, the biogenic electricity generation by MFC using azo dye was usually centred on the azo dye treatment using an MFC system which implemented single or stacked proton exchange membrane (MFC) for power generation. However, this study focused on determining the biogenic electricity generation performance of salt bridge stacked using *azo degrading* bacteria consortium for azo dye decolourisation and dye removal using AR-27 dye. The main idea for the study was to use the *C. freundii* A1 and *E. casseliflavus* C1 bacteria in the form of consortium as these bacteria combination has yet been studied for the decolourisation and electricity generation in MFC. Furthermore, this study attempted to assess the stacked MFC potential for a higher electricity generation. Hence, the performance of the bacteria consortium were initially evaluated at an optimised co-substrates concentration using synthetic wastewater under sequential facultative anaerobic-aerobic condition before being applied into the MFC systems. Then, the optimised synthetic textile wastewater was introduced into the optimised salt bridge stacked MFC for the assessment of biogenic electricity generation. Therefore, the problem of low voltage production by salt bridge MFC can be theoretically solved by using the selected optimum conditions for higher voltage generation. This study could provide a solution for the current treatment of textile effluent and as an alternative green energy in the future.

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